

The King's Game

The Kusanagi family had a custom of gathering together for the New Years to have a party.

The main family and its off branches gathered in one big hall and drank till they dropped.

There were unexpectedly many heavy drinkers in the family and only a few people couldn't hold their liquor.

The enormous amounts of alcohol their ancestors had kept consuming had led to their family developing alcohol-decomposing-enzymes on par with the Russians. At least that is how one of their relatives had recklessly put it.



This gathering stressed Godou out to no end.

The banquet by itself was still fine. Well, it was a good chance to rekindle relationships with relatives one didn't see often. However.

Later there was the after party, which was the truly troubling matter.

Hanafuda, cee-lo, poker, backgammon, mahjong, it was this sort of crazy gambling festival that combined Japanese and Western games.

Furthermore, they were betting real money, and with ridiculous amounts at that.

On the surface children were strictly forbidden from participating, but Godou had intermingled since he was six.

Godou had always been dearly loved by an old man who had died 5 years ago. The legend stated that long ago this man was the strongest as well as the last gambler of Kantou. Whenever they met, the old man would teach Godou various games.

A few relatives who knew about this took Godou gambling for fun on New Years.

...in the end, he made a killing.

By then it was unstoppable. Like a rolling stone.

To take revenge, once New Year came around the adults would get fired up and force Godou to come with them. And he would inadvertently win. This year was the tenth year of this never ending cycle of madness.

Well, I'm in high school now, it's about time I get away from that...

Godou muttered words of caution to himself.

Right now it was late in the wintry month of December. The end of the year and the New Year celebrations were right around the corner. This year he really had to cut ties with that unpleasant gambling party...

Well, even if he went, perhaps he could just play in a way that didn't stand out...

However that wouldn't work. In the face of both victory and defeat, he would be ignited with a blazing battle spirit. Godou painfully thought about how this could completely be described as a gambling hell.

It was about time to think of countermeasures.

While Godou was racking his brains, the 25th of December arrived.

It was the day after the modest party held on Christmas Eve. On this day "the usual suspects" - Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena - had gathered at the Kusanagi household.

The party had gone late into the night.

When the morning after the party came, everyone assembled once again to tidy up the house.

After everyone finished cleaning the house, they gathered in the living room for a break.

They were chatting and exchanging their plans for New Year. It wasn't until this moment that Godou found out about the end-of-the-year festivities the hime-mikos had. Furthermore, for a certain reason he decided he would also participate, but—

—That is a later story.

"Excuse me, there are some matters that require my attention. I'll be outside answering the phone."

Erica's cellphone ringtone had suddenly sounded. After she briefly glanced over the name on the display screen, Erica got up.

"Looks like she is quite busy during the end of the year...." muttered Godou as he eyed Erica from behind as she left the living room.

For the two hime-miko Yuri and Ena, New Year's holidays meant a busy period, too. Maybe everyone was tied up during this time after all.

"In Europe, even more than New Year's, the time around Christmas - right about now - is the liveliest, busiest period. Come the new year, it's all the more peaceful though," said Liliana, who was born in Europe.

Thinking about it, many countries with the lunar or Hindu calendar also celebrated New Year's, although it seemed like the various customs differed greatly depending on where you were. Godou was intrigued by the thought.

"Which reminds Ena, Your Majesty said you didn't want to go to the New Year's party?"

"As I recall, you said there was that difficult after party?"

Godou nodded in response to Ena's and Yuri's questions

"Frankly, calling it an after party isn't quite the right expression. This is a gathering in which the men among our relatives will use a ridiculous amount of money to go on an all-night gambling spree. They even specially reserve a small restaurant..."

"Hey, that sounds pretty interesting~."

"G-Gambling.....are you talking about betting money!?"

While Ena's eyes were sparkling, the sensible Yuri was shocked.



"U-um, why is a minor like Godou participating in such a gathering? I just don't understand the reason."

"Ahhh.....When I was a child I accidentally made a killing once. Since then, every year they would force me to participate."

"Well..."

"Anyway, I also think it's time for me to get away from gambling."

"G-Godou-san, someone your age shouldn't be saying these kinds of things...."

Of course Yuri was expressing her dissatisfaction. On the other hand, Liliana said the following:

"Kusanagi Godou, would you mind if I accompany you? As your grand chamberlain, it is one of my duties to support you in that situation."

"You'd better not, Liliana~.....I don't think you'd be able to adapt to that kind of environment."

"Not able to adapt?"

"Simply put, there's that Salvatore Doni, right? Imagine dozens of people like him getting fired up, absorbed in gambling like idiots, eyes bloodshot... Have fun with that dump truck with broken brakes."

"" ... ""

After hearing the name of that brainless young Italian, Yuri and Liliana fell silent altogether.

Their expressions were half shocked, half astonished. Apparently it got across that it was a racket beyond help or reason.

However the third girl - Ena was actually happily laughing.

"Ena's been coming and going at such places since she was a child. Your Majesty seems very capable, too. How about a contest with Ena?"

"With you, Seishuun?"

"Ena's been taught by that well-connected uncle and the priest, and her fencing master, too, so she can boast a bit. Want to give it a shot?"

"I've got no reason to refuse, but... your acquaintances are also messed up, aren't they?"

A priest and a kendoist (someone who does kendo~~) teaching a little girl how to gamble...

Their titles seemed strict, but the details reminded him of Yakuza more than anything, Godou murmured unintentionally.

"I wonder what we have in the house right now... if we search, finding a hanafuda deck or something should be really easy."

"Hanafuda~? Sure, then Yuri can play, too. This is perfect!"

""Eh?""

Ena's suggestion was fishy, so Godou and Yuri retorted in unison.

"Mariya actually gambles... no way, right?"

"Ah, yes. Ena said she knew a fun game and taught me, so I accompanied her from time to time and... don't tell me..."

"Yuri's got good intuition so she's actually quite a formidable opponent. Playing with her will be fun!"

"T-that actually was gambling, wasn't it!?"

"It's fine~. You didn't bet a single yen!"

"S-till. Come to think of it, whenever I won at those card games, Ena-san used to treat me to all those places!?"

"Well, it's better with some motivation, right~?"

"Hey, don't get Mariya involved in weird affairs she knows nothing about!"

Yuri was shocked to find out that she had unintentionally engaged in immoral conduct, Ena laughed anyway and was rebuked by Godou.

Liliana, who had been quietly listening to this conversation from the side, noisily cleared her throat.

"If we are all playing, I may be somewhat disadvantaged at a Japanese game. I would like you to be considerate of that fact."

"Then~... let's play something simple like trump or dice."

"Is Liliana-san participating as well? If that is the case we'll have to do this properly."

While Godou was thinking, Ena was feeling around in her pocket in front of him. She produced several coins. They were not game money but real 100 and 500 yen coins.

"W-we're betting money, Ena-san!?"

"Isn't this much peachy?"

"This probably amounts to lunch money..... Well, there shouldn't be any problems if we just spend it on that afterwards."

Godou came up with the idea because it was almost noon.

Yuri and Liliana were not really enthusiastic but in the end they got caught up in it.

The young lady who was actually quite skilled. The knight estranged from all matters gambling. The child of nature who already had the presence of a gambler. Just how would this game develop?



They wanted a simple and fair game, so they chose Cee-lo^[1].

However they completely gave up on the annoying rules regarding the '1 - 2 - 3' and '4 - 5 - 6'. They didn't use a dice cup either. All they did was roll three dice and compared the results.

Godou, Yuri, Liliana, and Ena alternated turns and got immersed into the game.

Twenty minutes passed.

As a result of the match taking place in the Kusanagi's living room, everyone's bets were piling up in front of Godou. By the way, everyone had only bet the small sum of 1000 yen.

The match had played out rather reasonably.

In the end, the inexperienced Liliana was the first to lose all her money and afterwards the remaining three people were pretty evenly matched. She competed against Godou to the very end but eventually exhausted all her strength as well.

Just like that, Godou was the sole victor.

"Uhh~..... Your Majesty, let's play another round!"

"Alright, I'll give this back then."

Godou took the 4000 yen total and equally distributed the 100 yen and 500 yen coins back to everyone after hearing Ena's request.

They had a second round. Again, Kusanagi Godou won.

Third round, Godou's win. Fourth round, Godou's win once again.

".....Is there some sort of trick to winning this?"

After his fourth victory, Liliana just had to ask.

"It is hard to imagine that there exists an explanation for someone who can keep winning continuously in such a luck based game."

"Well, I can't say there's none."

Godou readily answered and Liliana pushed on.

"If it is not too much to ask, please tell me. Or is it some kind of secret?"

"It isn't that kind of thing. It's just, you know, the only thing I do is refrain from having even the slightest thought of losing and whenever I roll the dice, I believe that victory will certainly come to me."

"And you win with just that!?"

Godou nodded at the astonished Liliana.

When he was a small child, he had learned the 'secret of winning' from that distantly related grandpa. What's important is luck, confidence, analyzing the field and the tenacity for victory. That's the ultimate secret the old man had passed on to him.

This old man carried a Kurikara dragon pattern on his back and could confront twenty hoodlums with just a long dagger. With such tales of bravery, he was quite a formidable person. Each and every one of his teaching was like a childhood trauma, still actively resonating inside Godou to this day.

As a matter of fact, that philosophy was unexpectedly useful when fighting against gods, too.

"As I thought, someone slaying gods isn't normal~..."

"Now that you mention it, when we travelled to London, I heard from Princess Alice that Alexander Gascoigne-sama is also very adept at gambling..."

Ena's and Yuri's unanimous evaluations left Godou flustered.

"Th-this is nothing like a special skill. Please stop putting it like it's related to Campione. And don't compare me to that Gascoigne, either."

That common point with Alec had caught him off guard.

While he was concealing his inner unrest, even Liliana joined in:

"But I have also heard about it: previously in Monaco when Sir Salvatore played roulette for the first time, his winnings through beginner's luck were off the charts... Maybe devil kings, who have superhuman good luck and a tenacity for victory, should have more talent in this field compared to normal humans...."

Godou panically refuted this very serious opinion.

"W-wait a minute! There are many people who are better at gambling than I am! Take Erica for example."

"What about me? Looks like you're all having a good time here."

With great timing, the blonde Italian girl returned to the living room.

She had been away from her seat for quite a while so it must have been a very complicated matter. But now she was smiling with her usual splendor and radiance.

Seeing that smile, Godou had an idea.

"Hey, Erica. It's been a while but how about a bet just between you and me? The loser will have to go and buy everybody's lunch."

"We haven't done that for a while, have we? I'm in."

Erica readily answered and produced one gold coin from her wallet.

It was an antique from ancient Rome. Carrying this kind of thing around was so like her. Erica flipped the coin into the air with her thumb.

She used the back of her left hand to catch the falling gold coin and quickly covered it with her right.

"I leave it to you Godou. Heads or tails, which is it?"

"I say tails."

Immediately after he replied, Erica lifted her right hand.

It was unknown which one, but the appearing coin had the carving of the face of a Roman emperor.

It was heads.

"...It's my loss. I just can't seem to win against Erica."

The two of them had often decided who'd have to go buy lunch like this right after Erica had transferred in. Ever since Yuri joined in, they had stopped doing it. Godou felt like he had kept winning early on, but before he knew it, the losses started piling up.

"I can't win that often in card games like poker either.... as you can see, there are people who are better at gambling than I am so don't think I'm weird, ok?" Godou told Liliana, Yuri and Ena who had watched this act.

After watching the three girls stiffly nod, Godou gathered the coins they had been using in place of chips and got up.

He took Erica's lunch money as well and left the house just like that.

Thus the four girls remained in the Kusanagi's living room.

One minute after Godou had left his seat, Liliana slowly began speaking.

"Erica, that just now... did you do that?"

"Yes, if I don't, I can't really win against Godou in these games."

When Erica openly confessed, Yuri sighed.

"So you did trick him with magic..."

"You cheated! But I'm surprised His Majesty didn't notice~"

"That's because I'm careful. I lose once in awhile. And because Godou himself keeps winning at gambling like it's a joke, he doesn't doubt me too much when I do the same. He just feels like 'such things happen'."

After answering the astonished Ena, Erica laid her eyes on the dice on the table.



"I wanted to try gambling with Godou, but wasn't it amazing? When I noticed his talent I was shocked too. The people who become Campiones really are extraordinary in every way."

"But counteracting that by cheating with magic is problematic too...", the overly serious knight Liliana gave her a sour look. However, Erica replied with the composed face of a noblewoman.

"I'm a bit reluctant about it as well. But it's fine. Godou wants to believe that he's 'normal' himself doesn't he? When he learned that I was "stronger" at gambling, he was actually really happy."

"I see. Because he's too good, he has an antipathy against gambling~."

"The way he thinks is the "only" thing about Godou that adheres to common sense, isn't it...."

"Don't you think letting him dream a bit is a show of consideration as his lover? And nobody's bothered by it either!"

Erica winked as if indicating this was exactly her intention at the nodding Ena and Yuri.

References

1. [↑] Cee-lo: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cee-lo>

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Credits

Story : Taketsuki Jou
Illustrator : Sikorsky
Translator : Kadi & others

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